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STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN

1. Through its regional seminars, workshops and international conferences, as well as in specific projects at the national and field levels, the International Council of Women (ICW) has had a long history of cooperation with UNICEF both directly as a sponsor and as a catalyst for assistance to its affiliated national councils.

2. As an organization with over 100 years of experience in working for the equality of men and women in all aspects of social, economic and political life, it is only natural that its interests in the health, education and welfare of women and children should coincide with those of UNICEF in specific programmes and projects, such as universal child immunization (UCI), maternal and child health (MCH) centres, breast-feeding, family planning, day-care centres, formal, informal and non-formal education, clean water and sanitation, protection of the environment, appropriate technology, alternate sources of energy, drug abuse, street children, abused children and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

3. Member councils benefiting from UNICEF technical support and cooperation have included those in Burkina Faso (support for teachers, provision of mopeds to reach rural settlements), India (workshops and extension courses, use of grain mills), Indonesia (literacy, training workshops for low-income women), Guatemala (health centre), Lesotho (nursery, kindergarten and primary and vocational training schools), Nigeria (water and women's farming cooperatives), Philippines (combating trafficking in women and children), Sierra Leone (immunization nation-wide), Turkey (breast-feeding, functional literacy) and Zimbabwe (sanitation projects in building latrines and wells, education in rural areas, maternal health centre).

4. Extensive programmes in UNICEF areas of interest in health and education are conducted as well by national councils of women in Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Peru, the Philippines, Thailand, Tunisia, Western Samoa, Papua New Guinea and others. They range from immunization, breast-feeding and the control of diarrhoea to cultivating home gardens, tree planting and water purification; from family planning, health and nutrition education to vocational training, support of income-generating projects and the promotion of equal compulsory education for girls in the basic literacy skills, as well as extensive efforts in promoting and supporting administrative and legislative action. Attention is also given to special groups such as migrants and their children, refugees, children in difficult circumstances, etc.

5. The structure of each national council is such that the work of many or most, and in some cases all, women's organizations in a country working in different areas of interest, e.g. health, education, legislation, vocational training, economics, child and family, etc., are coordinated so that common aims may be pursued more effectively. In the same way, the national councils, through their standing committees in those areas of special interest that parallel the 13 standing committees of ICW and through their participation in the Executive Committee of ICW, develop resolutions and common plans of action that are acted upon between triennial assemblies of ICW. United Nations and UNICEF themes have been closely followed and often anticipated.

6. It is suggested that as women's organizations are country-wide in membership and encompass rural and urban areas, UNICEF might find it useful to provide them with training in the technical skills of project development through ICW and its national councils. The potential for reaching grass-roots populations would be considerable.

7. We welcome the decision adopted by the Executive Board at its last session that focuses attention on the girl child. As has become increasingly evident, to the extent that the girl child is given full access to health and educational opportunities, not only she but her offspring as well will be healthier, happier and more productive members of the family, community and nation. Conversely, a girl who has been undernourished, undereducated and constrained in her development potential has little chance of escaping poverty with its attendant high morbidity and early mortality for herself and her children. We hope that at its present session the Board will make every effort to ensure that UNICEF programmes do indeed focus on the girl child.

8. A theme that has recurred in a number of our regional seminars and reports of national councils is the importance of shared parental responsibilities in the home and in child-rearing. During the World Summit for Children, one of the heads of Government noted that there had been no reference to the role and responsibilities of the father. ICW believes that the health, welfare and development of children are seriously undermined when there is no partnership between the father and the mother in all aspects of family life, including the rearing of the children. It hopes that UNICEF will help to eradicate the outdated stereotypes that so often prevent such a partnership.

9. We would like to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation for the remarkable progress made by UNICEF in recent years in saving millions of children's lives, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the success of the World Summit for Children under the outstanding leadership of its Executive Director and the Executive Board. ICW has been proud to cooperate in these efforts.